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H. Farrer. 1877

THE WASHINGTON MONUMENT.

(Concluded from page 12.)



R. H. R. SEARLE'S design for the completion of the Washington Monument¹ is published with a descriptive pamphlet by the author. Its principal claim to notice resides in the treatment of the lower stage, which is composed of three terraces with battering walls, from the uppermost of which the main shaft arises with a greater propriety and dignity of effect than is attained in most of the other designs. The transition from the sloping walls of the base to those of the shaft is not without a character of originality, and the treatment of the three terraces, following the principle of the Mexican teocallis, exhibits a commendable spirit of hardihood in substituting

for the more familiar types of form one which perhaps is rarely recognized by the architect among his resources of design. The three successive truncated pyramids of the base, and the massive quality of their structure, are acceptable features in combination with a plain treatment of the shaft, and prepare the eye for its final grave ascent much more effectually than any composition of classical detail or feeling yet offered. This is the strong point of Mr. Searle's study, and if it had been carried out with a commensurate breadth of treatment in all its parts, if its vigor of outline had been combined with that refinement and thoughtfulness of detail which is absolutely essential to the national monument of a great civilized people, and with a due feeling for proportion and scale, which are necessary elements in any work of art, it would have fairly entered into the domain of high composition.

The main opportunity of the design is its capacity for breadth and severity of treatment; but by the division of the faces of the terraces into panels by a series of strongly-marked piers of massive masonry, the full effect of repose which would have been attained by leaving the long horizontal lines of the terraces unbroken save at the corners, is lost; and there is substituted an unnecessary and fatal contrast of vertical features which disturbs and distracts the eye, breaks up the surfaces, and destroys their due relations of harmony with the shaft above. The important effect of repose is still further disturbed by the ascending lines of the steps, which, except perhaps in the first terrace, would have been more happily bestowed in the interior. The whole effect of the base is thus rendered far too busy for the superstructure, and the subdivision into panels is contrived with an affectation of rudeness and with an absolute want of study and feeling for the value of detail, conferring upon the whole composition an aspect of barbarism. The opportunity offered by the faces of the terrace walls for a continuous frieze of sculpture, historical or emblematical, is very precious, and the arbitrary division of these faces into panels is thus, in respect to sculpture, also a distinct loss; for separate pictures or compo-

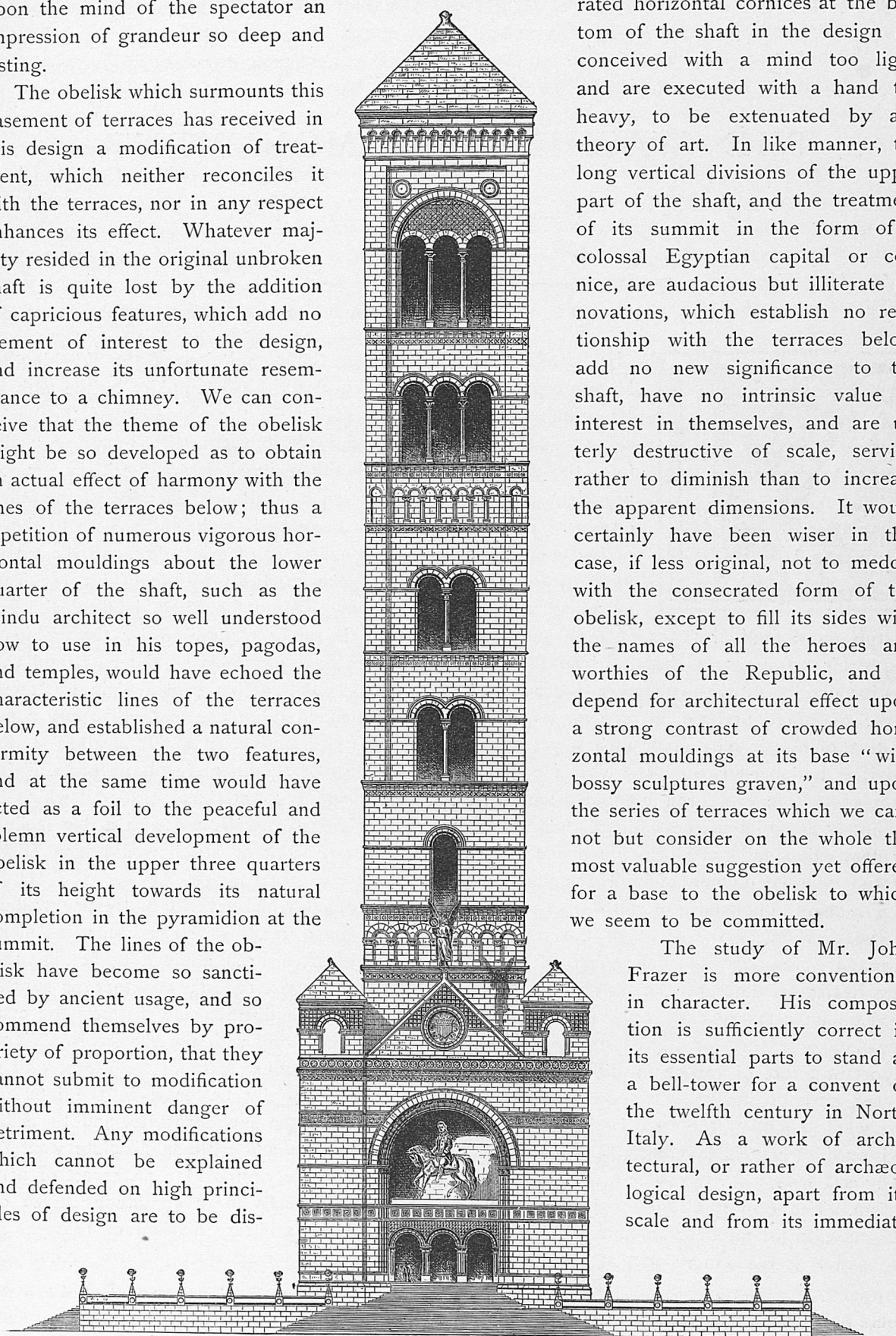
¹ See page 11. The five illustrations which follow, as well as the one on page 11, are phototype reproductions from the original studies, which have been kindly loaned for the purpose.

sitions of figures, can never leave upon the mind of the spectator an impression of grandeur so deep and lasting.

The obelisk which surmounts this basement of terraces has received in this design a modification of treatment, which neither reconciles it with the terraces, nor in any respect enhances its effect. Whatever majesty resided in the original unbroken shaft is quite lost by the addition of capricious features, which add no element of interest to the design, and increase its unfortunate resemblance to a chimney. We can conceive that the theme of the obelisk might be so developed as to obtain an actual effect of harmony with the lines of the terraces below; thus a repetition of numerous vigorous horizontal mouldings about the lower quarter of the shaft, such as the Hindu architect so well understood how to use in his topes, pagodas, and temples, would have echoed the characteristic lines of the terraces below, and established a natural conformity between the two features, and at the same time would have acted as a foil to the peaceful and solemn vertical development of the obelisk in the upper three quarters of its height towards its natural completion in the pyramidion at the summit. The lines of the obelisk have become so sanctified by ancient usage, and so commend themselves by propriety of proportion, that they cannot submit to modification without imminent danger of detriment. Any modifications which cannot be explained and defended on high principles of design are to be dis-

trusted; thus, the two widely separated horizontal cornices at the bottom of the shaft in the design are conceived with a mind too light, and are executed with a hand too heavy, to be extenuated by any theory of art. In like manner, the long vertical divisions of the upper part of the shaft, and the treatment of its summit in the form of a colossal Egyptian capital or cornice, are audacious but illiterate innovations, which establish no relationship with the terraces below, add no new significance to the shaft, have no intrinsic value or interest in themselves, and are utterly destructive of scale, serving rather to diminish than to increase the apparent dimensions. It would certainly have been wiser in this case, if less original, not to meddle with the consecrated form of the obelisk, except to fill its sides with the names of all the heroes and worthies of the Republic, and to depend for architectural effect upon a strong contrast of crowded horizontal mouldings at its base "with bossy sculptures graven," and upon the series of terraces which we cannot but consider on the whole the most valuable suggestion yet offered for a base to the obelisk to which we seem to be committed.

The study of Mr. John Frazer is more conventional in character. His composition is sufficiently correct in its essential parts to stand as a bell-tower for a convent of the twelfth century in North Italy. As a work of architectural, or rather of archaeological design, apart from its scale and from its immediate

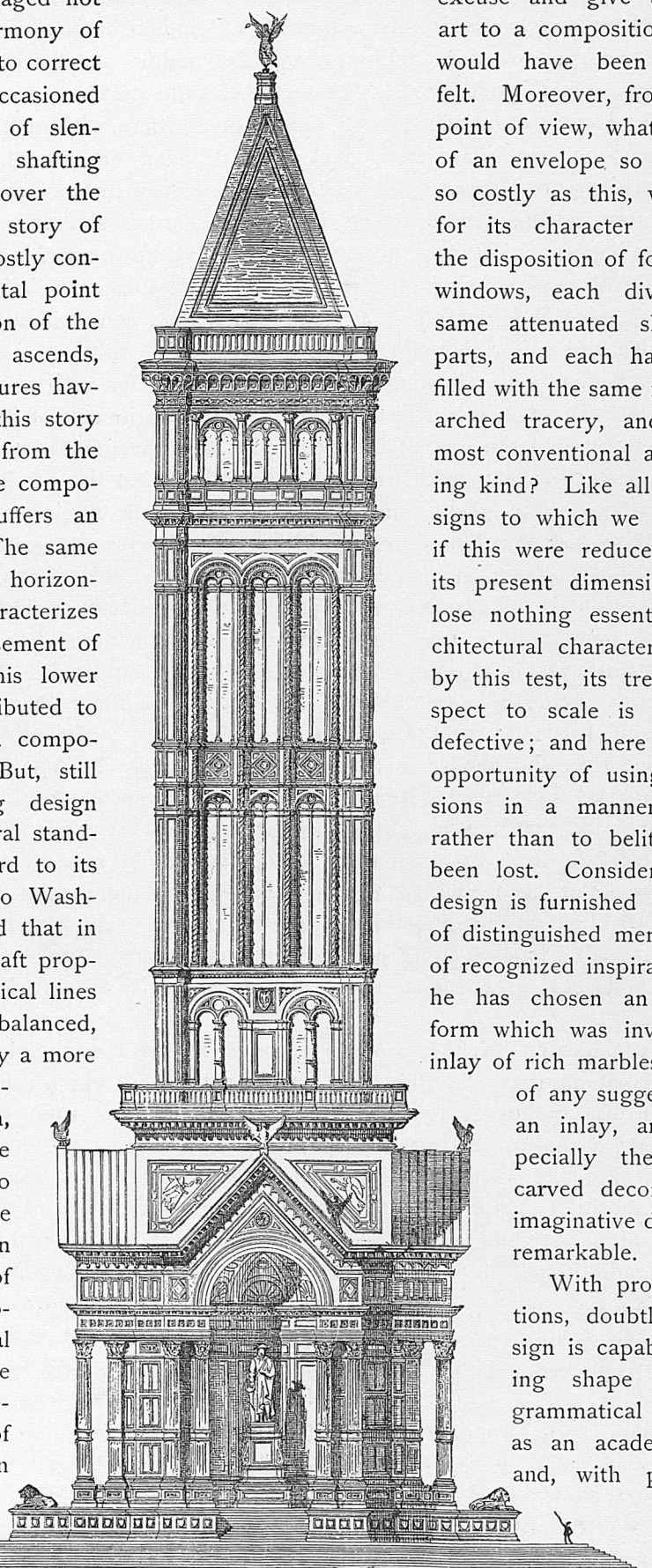


purpose as a memorial, it is careful, timid, precise. But it retains the worst of the characteristics of the Romanesque campaniles,—the recurrence of similar heights of stories, the monotonous round-arched openings, one at the bottom, two in the middle, and three at the top, the bald and unstudied outlines,—and it adds to these characteristics the unfortunate invention of four miniature campaniles of the same sort, attached to the angles of the base, with gabled curtain-walls between, which are pierced on one side with a great niche forming the portal, but how treated on the other three sides does not appear. From behind this strange mask of gables and pyramidal roofs the enormous mass of the central tower rises with a curious sort of surprise, and, without any diminution or relief of outline from bottom to top, proceeds upward *ad infinitum*, repeating its unimaginative details and offering no preparation for its final completion; until at last, by an act of arbitrary choice, it is cut off at a prodigious height, and finished with a very proper machicolated cornice and a low pyramidal roof.

The manifest difficulty of adjusting a scale of details fit for such enormous dimensions meets in this design even with a less satisfactory solution than in any of its competitors. The four corner towers attached to the foot of the great pile, with the gables between, are in their details adapted to the scale of a man with reasonable precision; but the details of the colossal central tower belong to a race of giants, and it contains no feature to give a just idea of its size. A tower of less than half the dimensions would properly receive the same amount, character, and proportion of details. From an archæological point of view this design is mechanically correct, but the composition is uninformed with any touch of poetic feeling. As a monument to Washington, the founder of a great Republic based upon modern ideas of political liberty, this vast monastic bell-tower is curiously anachronistic and inapplicable. The introduction of the colossal equestrian statue of the Father of his Country in the niche over the portal, after the fashion of that of Louis XI. at Blois, although furnishing a sufficiently secular element, is not enough to redeem it, and render it fit for these new uses. Perhaps its designer had in mind the notion expressed by the late Robert Dale Owen in speaking of the architecture of the Smithsonian Institute, that the masculine energy and rude strength of its Romanesque prototypes are appropriate to a new departure in civilization, because of their proved vitality and productive force. But even this analogy is destroyed by the precise modern character of the masonry, by its whiteness and smoothness, and by the very delicacy of workmanship which is suggested by the drawing. It tells no story, strikes no chord, awakens no emotions, save of astonishment at its vast proportions, at its gloomy waste of spaces within and without, and its absolute silence.

The most conspicuous of the projects volunteered for the completion of the Monument in a manner commensurate with the great occasion and with our position as a civilized nation, is embodied in the design of the sculptor Story, sent to us from his studio in Italy. He proposes to encase the present stump of the shaft with a marble envelope profusely enriched with panelling, after the manner of the Florentine Gothic of the Campanile of Giotto, and to extend the composition thus encased to a height about double that of the present structure, and to crown it with a pyramid of marble surmounted by a little figure of Fame, at a height of about three hundred and fifty feet from the ground. The podium more nearly recalls classic forms, and is one hundred feet high with vast projecting porches on each of the four faces, one of which contains enshrined a colossal statue of Washington set in a niche more than sixty feet high. This podium finishes with a cornice of sharp projection and an overhanging balustrade, which, being six feet high instead of three, gives to the whole a false scale. From this gallery the Gothic shaft, with a sudden change of *motif*, rises abruptly. In its design it adheres quite closely to the suggestions presented by the Florentine masterpiece; but in the absence of the marble inlays, of the abundant fine sculpture, and of the rich and various details which are the real *raison d'être* of the original, and give to it all its interest and value, the modern example seems bald and mechanical,—the identity of its parts is absolute. Its division into four stages of

irregular heights is managed not without feeling for harmony of proportion, and goes far to correct the effect of effeminacy occasioned by the superabundance of slender vertical lines in the shafting and panelling which cover the surface; but the lower story of the shaft proper being mostly concealed at every accidental point of view by the projection of the gallery from which it ascends, and no architectural features having been furnished in this story to soften the transition from the podium to the shaft, the composition at this point suffers an incurable dislocation. The same sort of multiplication of horizontal features which characterizes the treatment of the basement of Giotto, if applied to this lower stage, would have contributed to redeem the design as a composition of architecture. But, still judging this interesting design from a purely architectural standpoint, and without regard to its fitness as a memorial to Washington, it is to be noted that in the composition of the shaft proper the prevalence of vertical lines should have been counterbalanced, for the sake of repose, by a more judicious use of interrupting horizontal belts, such, indeed, as seem to give repose and massiveness to the great original. If the design had been drawn so as to expose two of its sides at once, the absence of the technical devices which we have named, and more especially of that variety of detail which alone can

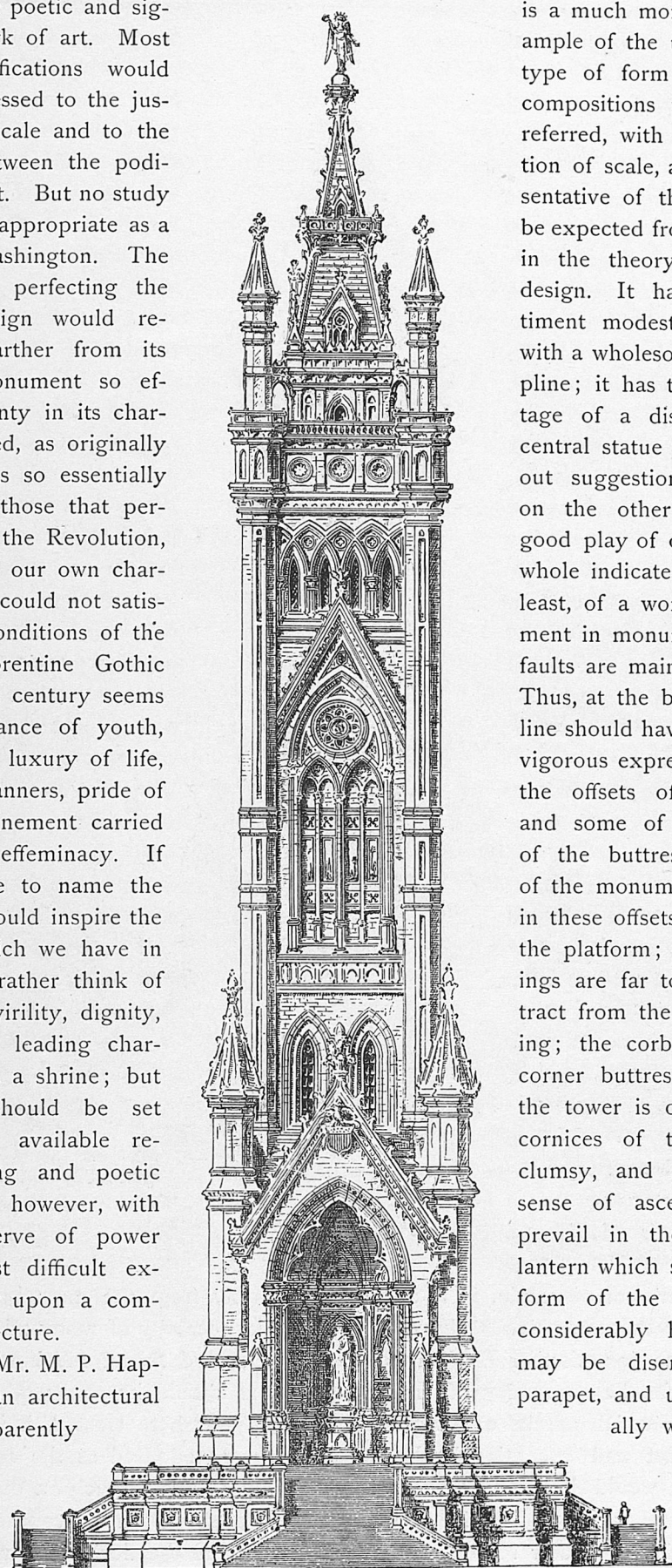


excuse and give a character of art to a composition of this sort, would have been more keenly felt. Moreover, from an æsthetic point of view, what is to be said of an envelope so enormous and so costly as this, which depends for its character entirely upon the disposition of forty-four blank windows, each divided by the same attenuated shaft into two parts, and each having its head filled with the same form of round-arched tracery, and that of the most conventional and uninteresting kind? Like all the other designs to which we have referred, if this were reduced to one half its present dimensions, it would lose nothing essential to its architectural character. As judged by this test, its treatment in respect to scale is fundamentally defective; and here again the rare opportunity of using vast dimensions in a manner to enhance rather than to belittle them has been lost. Considering that this design is furnished by a sculptor of distinguished merit and a poet of recognized inspiration, and that he has chosen an architectural form which was invented for an inlay of rich marbles, the absence of any suggestion of such an inlay, and more especially the paucity of carved decoration and of imaginative detail, are very remarkable.

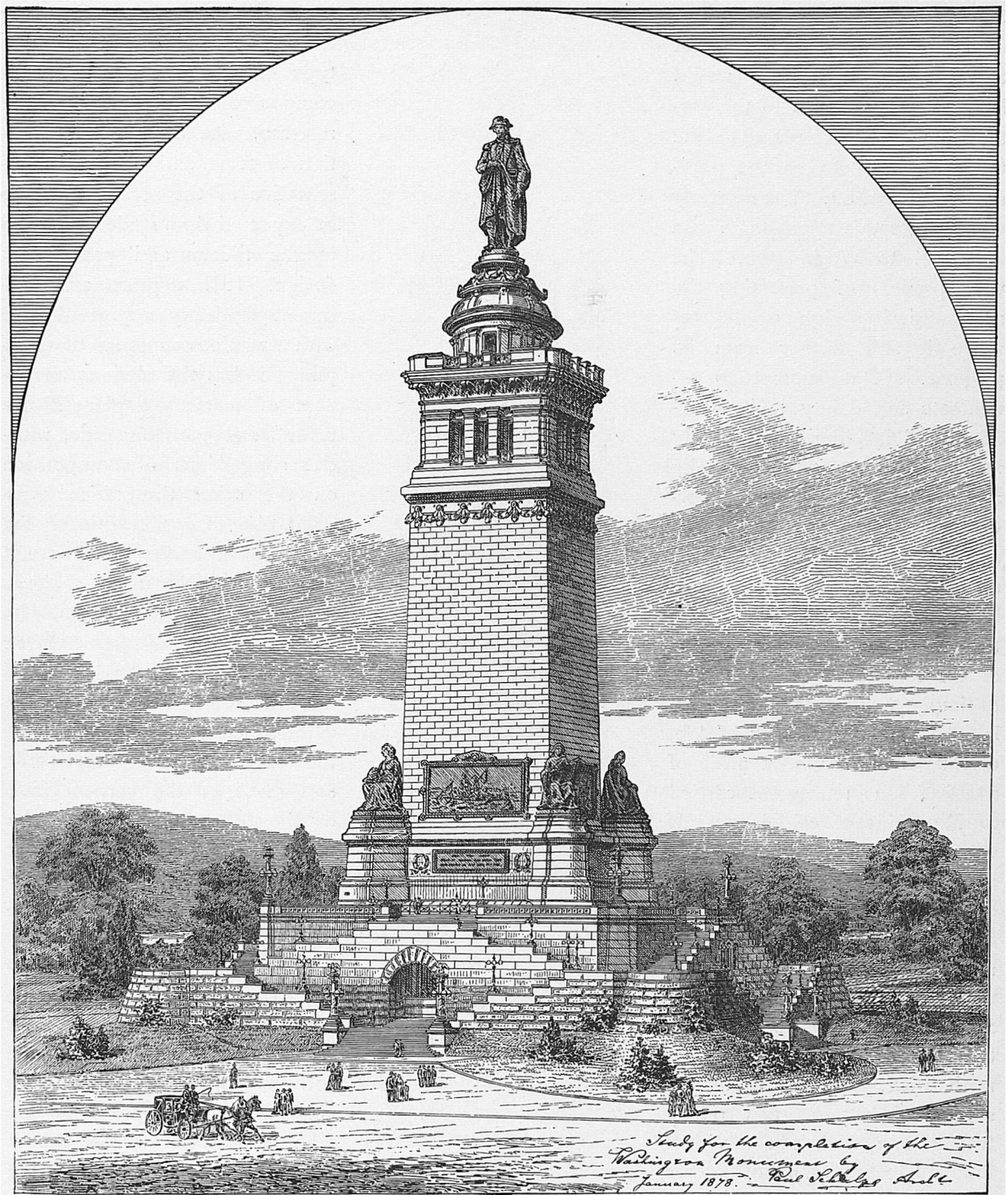
With proper modifications, doubtless, this design is capable of assuming shape much more grammatical and correct as an academical study, and, with proper addi-

tions, much more poetic and significant as a work of art. Most of these modifications would have to be addressed to the justification of its scale and to the reconciliation between the podium and the shaft. But no study could make this appropriate as a memorial to Washington. The very process of perfecting the architectural design would remove it still farther from its purpose. A monument so effeminate and dainty in its character, and inspired, as originally invented, by ideas so essentially at variance with those that pervaded the era of the Revolution, or which underlie our own character as a nation, could not satisfy the primary conditions of the theme. The Florentine Gothic of the fourteenth century seems to imply exuberance of youth, love of splendor, luxury of life, ostentation of manners, pride of art, fastidious refinement carried to the point of effeminacy. If we might venture to name the qualities which should inspire the especial work which we have in hand, we should rather think of repose, strength, virility, dignity, simplicity, as the leading characteristics of such a shrine; but these qualities should be set forth with every available resource of learning and poetic feeling, tempered, however, with that evident reserve of power which is the most difficult expression to confer upon a composition of architecture.

The study by Mr. M. P. Hapgood, of Boston, an architectural student, made apparently rather as an exercise in design than with competitive intent,



is a much more grammatical example of the use of an accepted type of form than any of the compositions to which we have referred, with a better appreciation of scale, and is fairly representative of the sort of work to be expected from students trained in the theory and practice of design. It has grace and sentiment modestly expressed, and with a wholesome sense of discipline; it has the obvious advantage of a distinct place for a central statue on one side, without suggestions of competition on the other three; it has a good play of outline, and on the whole indicates the beginning, at least, of a workmanlike achievement in monumental design. Its faults are mainly faults of detail. Thus, at the base, the horizontal line should have a fuller and more vigorous expression, especially in the offsets of the water-table, and some of the vertical lines of the buttresses on the sides of the monument should be lost in these offsets before they reach the platform; all the gable copings are far too heavy, and detract from the size of the building; the corbelled stage of the corner buttresses at the top of the tower is over-weighted; the cornices of the pinnacles are clumsy, and interfere with the sense of ascent which should prevail in these features; the lantern which sets upon the platform of the tower should be considerably higher, so that it may be disengaged from the parapet, and unite more effectually with the four pinnacles; and the crowning spire would have much more

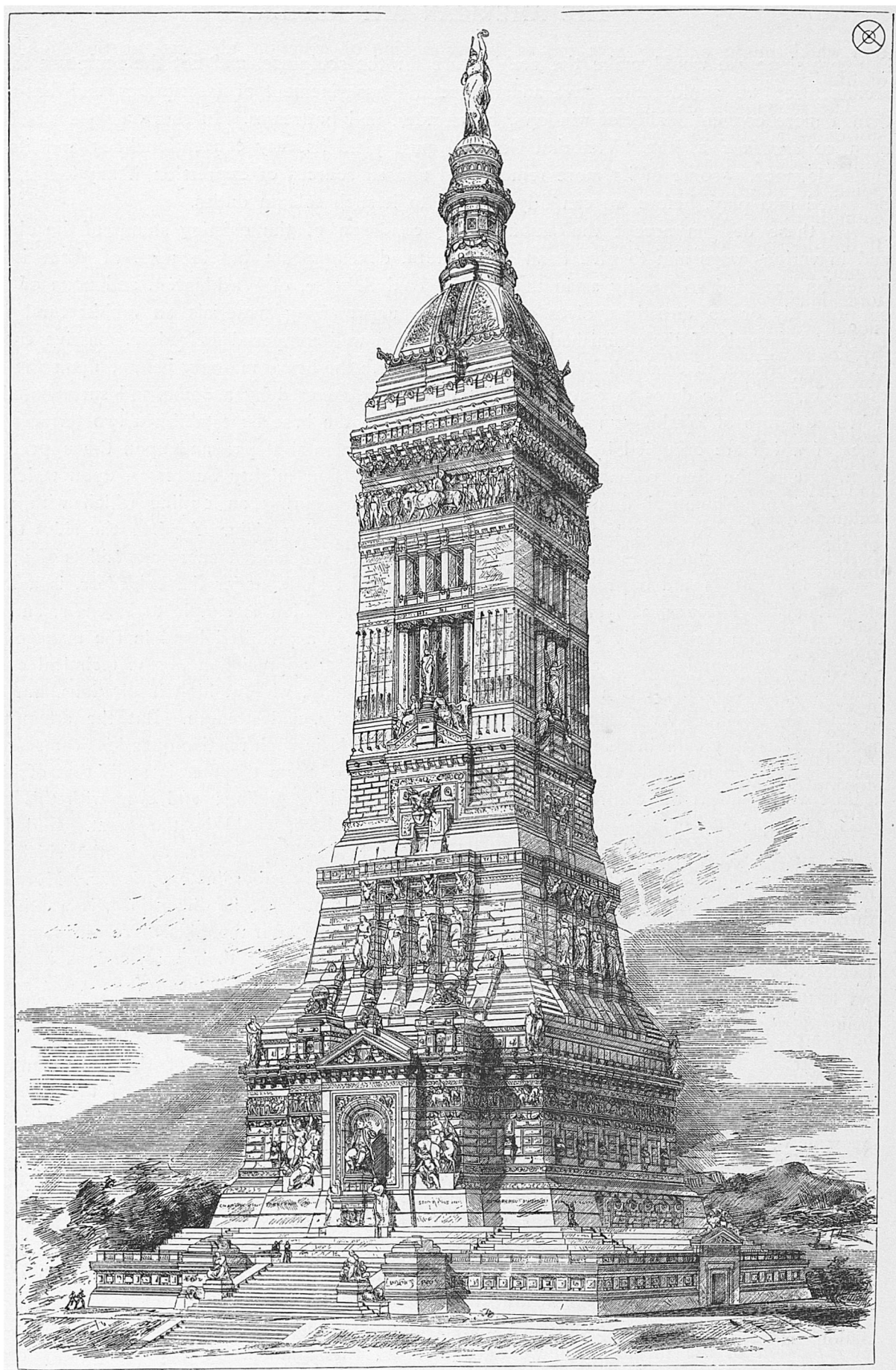


dignity, and appear more in scale, if it arose more simply from the mass below, and with less fretting of outline. A perspective study would betray the necessity of many other ameliorations of detail. But the question whether English Gothic, however modernized and however secularized, is a proper medium for the expression of such sentiments as should be conveyed in a monument to Washington, is one which admits of discussion. Certainly, as here treated, it is too conventional for a use so august and exceptional. If this design were adopted as the central feature for a great town-hall, it would have to submit to no essential change. Such a consideration should give us pause before we accord to it even a guarded approval, when proposed as our national memorial. We ask for greater repose of surface, for less of the florid and more of the serious

in expression; we would make the architecture for the sculpture, and not the sculpture for the architecture; we would rather have an architectural enshrinement of inscriptions and bas-reliefs than a mere conventionality of windows, balustrades, and buttresses. In short, a style which has been so *ordained* as the "Victorian Gothic" must yield its easy conventionalities and its too facile elegance,—some of its more remote and unused sources of expression, if any it has, must be called into play, before we can fitly commit to it such solemn duties.

All these designs accept the embarrassing condition of the existing stump of the obelisk, and in various ways aim to give it an architectural development; but in none of them is this condition accepted so frankly as in that of Mr. Paul Schulze, of Washington, and none of them so promptly or so directly evolves out of these unpromising materials an architectural idea. Upon the summit of the unfinished shaft he places a well-composed belvedere, massive enough in its proportions to establish harmonious relations with the heavy masonry below; upon the roof of the belvedere he dares to erect a low circular tower, covered by a dome, and surmounted by a bronze figure of Washington thirty-five feet high; at the base he establishes two terraces, the faces of which are occupied by the ascent of vast monumental steps; and upon the upper platform, against the four corners of the shaft, he erects four mighty buttresses, upon which are seated four emblematical figures, also in bronze, thus securing an outline which with some nobility of effect connects the structure with the surrounding plain. Against the sides of the shaft, between the buttresses and the emblematical figures, are affixed enormous tablets of bronze bearing inscriptions and bas-reliefs; and at the top of the shaft, under the belvedere, is a frieze of garlands or festoons, also in bronze. The whole composition is simple to bareness, and the two cornices are dangerously equal in value, but it betrays a practised hand in the management of great architectural masses, and an intelligent professional appreciation of the technical conditions of the problem. It is a workmanlike academical study, without high inspirations, but also without any straining for originality. It has repose, dignity, and strength. But the attempt to make a satisfactory combination of bronze and white marble in such relative quantities can scarcely succeed; the two materials will not blend, and the effect of them together is really that of black against white, unless the contrast of the metal is mitigated by gilding; and even with this mitigation, the quantity of the metal, almost encircling the base, would be too great. Gilded or bright metal against marble seems acceptable only in small quantities, as in the shields of metopes, or in capitals, and dark bronze against marble, only in subordinate positions. Moreover, the composition of the great tablets, forty by twenty feet at least in dimensions, is wanting in dignity and consciousness of scale, and they are treated like after-thoughts. We are compelled also to object to the staircases at the base, as much too vast for their uses, and as having a tendency to destroy the repose which should prevail about the foundations of so great a pile. It is a serious work, however, and although it is by no means inspired or poetic, it is perhaps the nearest approach yet made to a practical, business-like solution of the problem.

In strong contrast to all the other suggestions for the completion of the Monument, an interesting project from California, published anonymously in a late number of the *American Architect*, and here reproduced by permission, affords abundant and satisfactory recognition of the scale of the structure, and makes an adequate use of sculpture as a decorative accessory. It is a spirited and poetic composition, correctly set forth in the style of the modern French Renaissance, and might have been submitted in the latest architectural *concours* of the École des Beaux-Arts. It would seem that a style which has been so consistently and so consecutively developed from Roman types, which has been so refined by the study of a race of artists through successive centuries of civilization, and which in this progress has received such abundant accretions, such a boundless wealth of phraseology, and has thus become so pliable to the expression of modern ideas,—that such a style might have resources peculiarly applicable to the interpretation of the theme which we have now in contemplation. The present essay draws upon these resources perhaps with a too liberal hand, but it presents on the whole a concep-



tion which might well be accepted as the expression of a nation advanced in the higher arts of life.

The monument has its roots firmly planted in the ground by means of successive stages or stories with battering walls; it stands, as Browning says, "four-square," and finishes at the top with a sudden upward leap, presenting in general outline and in its multiplicity of detail strong points of affinity with some of the better Hindu pagodas. Indeed, in respect to detail it is enthusiastically overloaded, although this fault is largely condoned by the severity of its sky lines. If the designer had judiciously held his hand and spared his somewhat profuse invention, the dignity and repose of his design would have been increased. We feel this want of reserved force mainly in the central stage or die of the shaft below the well-conceived frieze of processional sculpture; this die is occupied by a great central aperture in each face, divided vertically by columns, and horizontally by a belt of mouldings, which is superfluously continued around the shaft; and the shaft is further subdivided at this place by long vertical channels, apparently with a view to counteract the too great prevalence of horizontal lines below. We venture to assert that this central die, which has been heralded by such a vast preparation of bases, and which is crowned with such ceremonial splendor, demands an especial distinction of treatment; and that if the horizontal belt and the channelling had been omitted here, and possibly if the columnar order dividing the aperture had been extended in long piers without the interruption of the belt, and if the masonry had been left unfretted by details, the proper contrast and balance of parts would have been more completely and more satisfactorily maintained.

This is the substance of the description which accompanies the design:—The panels on the face of the first terrace are stones presented by the various States of the Union; those presented by foreign states find a place in the battering plinth of the monument. The statue of Washington is seated in front of a niche, and the pedestal of the statue is supported by figures of Truth and Industry. The niche is flanked on either hand by groups representing Peace and War. Against the die of the pedestal of the monument are placed busts of the Revolutionary worthies, and under the corner of the pedestal is a frieze enriched with a procession of Industry; above, on the four angles of the cornice of the pedestal, are figures of Liberty, Justice, Education, and Suffrage. Against the next stage are the emblematical statues of the original States, and the gables which decorate the centres of the third stage bear statues typifying the North, the South, the East, and the West. The frieze under the main cornice is filled with a warlike procession, and the figure of America surmounts the whole, at a height of three hundred and thirty feet.

The iconology of this design might be improved. This, however, is not an essential point. Evidently the design is but a study; it is the outline of an heroic poem, crowded with incidents, set forth with a degree of rhetorical elegance which is full of promise. It has the merit of being distinctly monumental and entirely appreciative of the colossal scale of its masses.

Having in mind the lesson conveyed by these voluntary and patriotic contributions, which we have referred to because of the importance of the theme, and because they serve to suggest the boundless field of design which it opens to professional study, we earnestly commend to the Monument Commission, before committing itself without remedy to the completion of the original shaft, to open to architects a national competition of designs based upon a carefully studied programme of conditions and requirements. Such an invitation, if honestly made and allowed to bear its legitimate fruit, would do more to encourage art in this country, would give a greater impulse to monumental design, would obtain a more enthusiastic and more general response from the architects and sculptors of the nation, than any similar appeal ever made to any people; and the result of it would, we are sure, reflect the greatest credit upon our civilization, and go far to give us an assured and peculiar position in the world of art.

HENRY VAN BRUNT.